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UNH Horticultural Tech Students Create Sustainable Landscape

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Reporters and editors: To learn more about the sustainable landscape at Putnam Hall, contact associate professor Dana Sansom at 603-862-1036 or dmsansom@cisunix.unh.edu.

DURHAM, N.H. - This week, students in a horticultural technology class at the University of New Hampshire's Thompson School for Applied Science completed a final project that will live on long after grade books are closed and the students themselves have graduated.

Putting the "earth" into Earth Day, students in associate professor Dana Sansom's grounds management course installed sustainable landscaping around the university's Putnam Hall this week. In addition to providing low-maintenance yearround beauty, the landscaping will be a living classroom for future horticulture students and anyone interested in sustainable landscaping.

"We specifically chose plants not very common on campus, so the garden can be used as a teaching tool," said Thompson School student Henry Hess.

"And you can appreciate its beauty instead of having to prune," said Thompson School student Jim Lynn, who designed the landscape with Hess and student Katie Leipold. All 11 students in the class worked on the plan and studied sustainable landscaping for the past year.

For the past month, students in the course have been preparing the site - largely neglected for the past decade -- for the new design, removing overgrown plants, testing and preparing the soil with compost (UDoo, a product of food waste from UNH dining halls) and other amendments. They removed thick patches of aggressive pachysandra and several overgrown yews that were blocking light from entering the building.

Applying the principles of sustainable landscaping, the students focused on "right plant, right place," choosing plants that would be hardy in New Hampshire and siting them in as much sun or shade as they need to thrive. Not all plants are native - "There's some debate in sustainability as to whether plants have to be native to be sustainable," said Lynn - but none are invasive.

"They all live in harmony with native plants," Hess added. Plants were selected for their ability to attract wildlife by providing food or habitat; wildlife in turn sustains the landscape by providing pollination and returning organic matter to the soil.

Most of the garden's visitors will be drawn to its beauty, and the students designed the

garden with an eye toward yearround interest; a balance of colors, textures and sizes; and the inevitable (and desired) growth and maturity of each plant. The design uses no annuals, favored for their showy bursts of color but which must be planted each season then discarded in the fall. "If you plant your perennials and shrubs correctly, you can have blooms and yearround interest," said Hess, pointing out the bell-shaped flowers of Solomon's Seal, the golden spikes of rocket ligularia, the evergreen and red-berried holly bushes, and the andromeda Brower's Beauty.

Making the experience as real-world as possible, the grounds management students also managed a "staff" of volunteers and worked with vendors, soliciting donations from Millican Nurseries in Chichester, Stonepost Nursery in Raymond, and The Mixed Border in Hollis. "We had a great response from the landscape industry," said Sansom, their professor.

While both Hess, a Concord, Mass., native, and Lynn, a Bostonian who now lives in Epping, plan to pursue a bachelor's degree after they receive the Thompson School's associate's degree in May, they praise this capstone project for giving them a solid grounding in the field of landscaping and horticulture. "This has totally prepared us to have our own businesses when we leave instead of working for someone else," said Lynn.

Do they fear that the growing interest in sustainable, lower maintenance landscaping will jeopardize their future careers? Not at all. Plenty of landscaping is unsustainable and in need of professional services, they said. "And there's plenty of earth to be rejuvenated," said Hess.

For more information on horticultural technology at the Thompson School for Applied Science, go to <http://www.tsas.unh.edu/ht/index.html>.

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Photographs available to download:

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/plantings/_PAS2201%20copy.jpg

Caption: Kendra Hamel, a student in the grounds management course at UNH's Thompson School for Applied Science, installs sustainable landscaping in front of Putnam Hall on the UNH campus. Credit: Perry Smith/UNH Photographic Services.

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/plantings/_PAS2244%20copy.jpg

Caption: Thompson School associate professor Dana Sansom and grounds management student Katie Liepold of Wolfeboro Falls discuss the sustainable landscape Liepold helped design. Credit: Perry Smith/UNH Photographic Services.

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/plantings/_PAS2304%20copy.jpg

Caption: L - R: Thompson School students Douglas Maloy, Denison Church, Kendra Hamel and Julia Palatine discuss the sustainable landscaping in front of Putnam Hall. Credit: Perry Smith/UNH Photographic Services.

